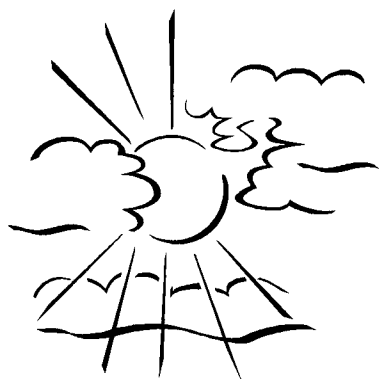


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*Important story at this spot

Articles in Today's Clips

Thursday, Sept. 29, 2005

(Be sure to maximize your screen to read your clips)

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 28, 2005

Governor Granholm Signs Bills Protecting Children from Sexual Predators

LANSING – Governor Jennifer M. Granholm today signed the 18-bill package aimed at protecting children from sexual predators while at school or day care. The new laws also strengthen reporting requirements for convicted sex offenders to ensure that the state's Sex Offender Registry is accurate.

"Parents deserve peace of mind knowing that their children are safe, especially when they are away from home," Granholm said. "This legislation will ensure that sexual predators cannot harm children while they are riding the bus, playing on the school playground, learning in classrooms, or at day care."

Granholm first called for this type of legislation in a letter to legislators in May. The letter asked the legislature to pass bills that would:

- create "Predator Free Zones" to keep sex offenders out of schools;
- require background checks on employees in public schools and day care centers;
- allow evidence of prior sex crimes to be considered as character evidence at trial;
- prevent teachers who are convicted sex offenders from returning to the classroom.

All of the provisions in the May letter are included in the package signed by the Governor today. The package also includes new requirements for people already on the state's Sex Offender Registry, including notification to the state immediately upon vacating the current residence and increased penalties for failing to report accurate residency information.

"We must remain diligent until we have taken every possible step to ensure that are children are safe," said Granholm. "I commend the legislature for acting quickly on this important legislation."

Granholm has been a long-time advocate of child protection issues. As governor, Granholm has worked hard to prompt action on the legislation being signed today, as well as the package of bills she signed into law two weeks ago limiting children's access to violent and sexually-explicit video games.

As attorney general, the Governor formed the High-Tech Crime Unit in conjunction with the Michigan State Police to crack down on Internet child pornographers and child predators. Attorney General Granholm also took on retailers who made alcohol and cigarettes available to children and shut down Websites that sold the ingredients to make GHB, the "date rape" drug.

At today's event, the Governor signed House Bill 4932 sponsored by Representative Ed Gaffney (R-Grosse Pointe Farms) and Senate Bill 129 sponsored by Senator Alan Sanborn (R-Richmond Twp).

Also in the package are: Senate Bill 617 sponsored by Laura Toy (R-Livonia); Senate Bill 606 sponsored by Michael Bishop (R-Rochester); Senate Bill 607 sponsored by Senator Bruce Patterson (R-Canton); Senate Bill 609 sponsored by Senator Wayne

Kuipers (R-Holland); Senate Bill 611 sponsored by Senator Jason Allen (R-Traverse City); Senate Bill 615 sponsored by Senator Bill Hardiman (R-Kentwood); Senate Bill 616 sponsored by Senator Nancy Cassis (R-Nov); House Bill 4402 sponsored by Representative Geoff Hansen (R-Hart); House Bill 4928 sponsored by Representative Brian Palmer (R-Romeo); House Bill 4930 sponsored by Representative Kevin Elsenheimer (R-Bellaire); House Bill 4934 sponsored by Representative Richard Ball (R-Bennington Twp); House Bill 4936 sponsored by Representative Rick Baxter (R-Concord); House Bill 4937 sponsored by Representative David Law (R-Commerce Twp); House Bill 4958 sponsored by Representative Bill Caul (R-Mt Pleasant); and House Bill 4991 sponsored by Representative Judy Emmons (R-Sheridan)

GRANHOLM SIGNS STUDENT SAFETY PACKAGE

Governor Jennifer Granholm on Wednesday signed legislation aimed at keeping sex offenders and certain felons away from children. The 18-bill package known as the student safety initiative has been one of this year's top priorities for both the governor and the Legislature.

Ms. Granholm, who on Wednesday signed the last of the package with HB 4932 and SB 129, commended the Legislature for acting quickly to pass the legislation, which, among other precautions, will require more extensive background checks on school employees, bar convicted sex offenders from continued teaching and create "predator free zones" near schools.

"Parents deserve peace of mind knowing that their children are safe, especially when they are away from home," she said. "This legislation will ensure that sexual predators cannot harm children while they are riding the bus, playing on the school playground, learning in classrooms, or at day care."

Other highlights of the new laws include providing stiffer penalties to sex offenders who fail to report address and other information to law enforcement and who fail to disclose prior sex convictions when seeking employment at a school, requiring childcare providers to undergo criminal records and history checks and allowing testimony about previous sex crimes to be used against a defendant as character evidence.

Other bills previously signed by the governor and included under the student safety umbrella are: SB 617, PA 121; SB 606; SB 607; SB 609; SB 611; SB 615; SB 616; HB 4402; HB 4928; HB 4930; HB 4934; HB 4936; HB 4937; HB 4958 and HB 4991. For descriptions of the bills see Gongwer Michigan Report, August 31, 2005.

Granholm Signs Student Safety Package

Gov. Jennifer **GRANHOLM** signed an 18-bill package this morning in Grand Rapids aimed at protecting children from sexual predators while at school or day care. The new laws also strengthen reporting requirements for convicted sex offenders.

The legislation stemmed from media accounts of situations where convicted sex offenders had been hired into jobs where they would be interacting with kids. Granholm initially called for the measures on May 3. Republicans announced the measures as the *Student Safety Initiative* on June 14.

"Parents deserve peace of mind knowing that their children are safe, especially when they are away from home," Granholm said. "This legislation will ensure that sexual predators cannot harm children while they are riding the bus, playing on the school playground, learning in classrooms, or at day care."

Today's release from Granholm emphasized her role in calling for the legislation.

"Granholm first called for this type of legislation in a letter to legislators in May," the news release stated.

The Granholm letter asked the Legislature to pass bills that would create "Predator Free Zones" to keep sex offenders out of schools, require background checks on public school and day care employees, allow evidence of prior sex crimes to be considered at trial and prevent convicted sex offenders from returning to the classroom.

All of the provisions in the May letter are included in the package signed by the Governor today. The package also requires those on the Sex Offender Registry to let the state know when they're moving. Those who don't keep their residency current with the state face increased penalties.

Published September 29, 2005
[From the Lansing State Journal]

Gov. signs bills to protect children from sex offenders

Associated Press

Legislation aimed at safeguarding children from sex offenders near schools and day care centers was signed Wednesday by Gov. Jennifer Granholm.

Granholm signed 18 bills, including one that bars registered sex offenders from living, working or loitering within 1,000 feet of a school.

The ban doesn't apply to certain youth offenders and those already living or working near schools.

Granholm, who called for similar measures in a May letter to lawmakers, commended the Legislature for working quickly on the legislation.

"Parents deserve peace of mind knowing that their children are safe, especially when they are away from home," she said in a statement.

Law creates 'predator-free zones'

Thursday, September 29, 2005

By Kyla King
The Grand Rapids Press

Gov. Jennifer Granholm signed bills in Grand Rapids that bar known sex offenders from living near or coming close to schools, among other things.

Declaring them "predator-free zones," Granholm signed the bills in front of a crowd at the Grand Rapids Police Department. At her side was state Rep. Mike Sak, a longtime advocate of the changes in the law.

Sak, a Grand Rapids Democrat, had pushed for the laws since 2002, when a paroled Grand Rapids man sentenced to life in prison for the 1981 strangulation and rape of a 6-year-old Connecticut girl wanted to move into a home four blocks from Kent Hills Elementary School. At the time, Sak was working in the Grand Rapids Public Schools and serving as a Kent County commissioner.

"The community was in turmoil because there was nothing on the books to stop this," Sak said. The legislation, an 18-bill package, bars sex offenders from living within a mile of a school or coming within 1,000 feet of it. A new law also requires background checks of all school and day-care employees and bus drivers, in addition to teachers. The new laws also prevent teachers who are convicted sex offenders from returning to the classroom and allow evidence of prior sex crimes to be used as character evidence at trial.

The legislation also requires people already in the state's Sex Offender Registry to notify the state as soon as they move, as well as increases penalties for failing to report accurate residency information.

"As a parent, I certainly know how vulnerable a parent feels sending a child off to school, or dropping them off at a day-care center," Granholm said. "There are evil-doers that slip through the cracks ... it takes just one to shake your confidence as a parent."

Educators applaud laws to protect kids

Thursday, September 29, 2005

DARRYL Q. TUCKER
THE SAGINAW NEWS

Mid-Michigan educators are commending Gov. Jennifer M. Granholm for signing legislation that aims to protect children from sexual predators while at school or day care centers.

Job No. 1 is "keeping our kids safe," said Saginaw School District spokesman Michael B. Manley, calling the new law an "important step in the right direction."

"This adds another layer of protection for our students," Manley said. "You can't be too careful. There's always something we can do to keep kids safe."

A Saginaw News investigation earlier this month showed that 63 convicted sex offenders -- about a sixth of all 363 offenders registered in Saginaw County -- live within 1,000 feet of a public or parochial school.

Of those, 18 offenders live within 500 feet of a school in Saginaw, Tittabawassee Township and Chesaning -- mostly in Saginaw. Three live within 200 feet of a school in Chesaning or Saginaw. The News examined the offenders' addresses from an online database the state police compiled. Granholm signed the 18-bill package into law Wednesday. It also strengthens reporting requirements for convicted sex offenders to ensure that the state's Sex Offender Registry is accurate.

"Parents deserve peace of mind knowing that their children are safe, especially when they are away from home," Granholm said. "This legislation will ensure that sexual predators cannot harm children while they are riding the bus, playing on the school playground, learning in classrooms or at day care."

"We must remain diligent until we have taken every possible step to ensure that our children are safe."

The legislation calls for:

Creating "Predator Free Zones" to keep sex offenders out of schools.

Requiring background checks on public school and day care center employees.

Allowing prosecutors to consider prior sex crimes as character evidence at trial.

Preventing teachers who are convicted sex offenders from returning to the classroom.

The package also includes new requirements for persons already on the state's Sex Offender Registry, including notification to the state immediately upon vacating a residence and increased penalties for failing to report accurate residency information.

Granholm called for the type of legislation in May.

"I certainly applaud her efforts and everyone involved," said Craig C. Douglas, superintendent of Carrollton Public Schools. "It's a step in the right direction."

Douglas said he understands the need to exchange information because if a sex offender came into his region, "we certainly would want to know it."

Carrollton schools already require background checks of potential teachers and administrators.

The Saginaw Intermediate School District handles the background checks for substitute teachers.

"It's very important," said Kathy L. Stewart, superintendent of Chesaning Union Schools.

Chesaning is taking an additional step of investigating the backgrounds of volunteers to ensure student safety, Stewart said.

"We're moving in the right direction to protect our children," she said. "What are issues now weren't issues 30 years ago."

Darryl Tucker covers courts for The Saginaw News. You may reach him at 776-9686.

Detroit Free Press

September 29, 2005

IN COURT

**Suspect in Internet
child-sex case is arraigned**

A 47-year-old Clarkston man was arraigned Wednesday in 41B District Court in Clinton Township on charges that he arranged a sexual rendezvous with someone he believed was a 14-year-old girl, according to the Macomb County Sheriff's Office.

Roderick D. Gronlund was charged with two counts of child sexually abusive activity, two counts of using a computer to communicate with another to commit a crime and one count of accosting a child for immoral purposes.

Gronlund had been chatting online with a Sheriff's Office reserve officer who was posing as a minor to nab Internet predators.

Believing he was communicating with a girl, he asked to meet at an undisclosed location in Macomb County for sex.

When he arrived there Tuesday, deputies arrested him.

By Christy Arboscello

REPORT NO. --, VOLUME 35

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 2005

Michigan Report

September 28, 2005

GRANHOLM LEADS CALL FOR FEDERAL HEATING ASSISTANCE

Governor Jennifer Granholm and Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney are leading a group of governors calling for increases in federal heating assistance funds to cover rising energy prices.

The governors are seeking \$1.276 billion in Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program in the fiscal year 2005-06 federal budget. The budget provides a cap of \$5.1 billion on the program, but actual funding available is about \$2 billion.

“Natural gas and other fuel costs have been rising all year, before and after Hurricane Katrina,” Ms. Granholm said. “We need Washington to keep its winter heating commitment by making sure states can serve at least as many families as we have in the past, even as higher prices make staying warm this winter less affordable for every family.”

The governors said the additional funds are needed given federal Energy Information Administration forecasts of energy costs increases as high as 77 percent.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 28, 2005

Granholm, 27 Other Governors Ask Congress to Fulfill Commitment to Keep Americans Warm This Winter

LANSING – In anticipation of severe spikes in energy prices, Governor Jennifer M. Granholm today led a bipartisan group of governors asking Congress to provide critically needed funding to help American families who will struggle this year to keep their homes warm.

“Congress must recognize that covering dramatic increases in natural gas and heating oil prices will pose an immense challenge for our citizens as winter arrives...Immediate emergency funding, and a significant increase in regular LIHEAP (Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program) funding for fiscal year 2006, would allow critical energy needs to be addressed before a crisis develops,” the Governors wrote in a letter to House and Senate appropriations leaders.

In recent weeks, the federal Energy Information Administration (EIA) has revised its winter heating cost forecasts and is projecting increases of up to 77 percent compared to last winter. Last month, Congress and the President approved a LIHEAP funding ceiling of \$5.1 billion as part of its comprehensive Energy Bill. However, actual funding is forecast to remain at approximately \$2 billion, an amount that serves only one out of five eligible families nationwide. Michigan’s current annual LIHEAP allotment is approximately \$117 million and serves nearly one million residents.

“Natural gas and other fuel costs have been rising all year, before and after Hurricane Katrina,” Granholm said. “We need Washington to keep its winter heating commitment by making sure states can serve at least as many families as we have in the past, even as higher prices make staying warm this winter less affordable for every family.”

The governors, led by Granholm and Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney (R-MA), are urging federal lawmakers to immediately add \$1.276 billion in emergency LIHEAP funds to significantly boost regular heating assistance for 2006.

Posted: 9-29-2005

Local groups consider helping local poor with heating costs

By KEVIN BRACISZESKI
Ludington Daily News Staff Writer

Representatives of local organizations met again Wednesday to discuss relief efforts for Hurricane Katrina victims and to discuss local needs they expect to come up during the winter.

The group had previously met twice to discuss coordinating local efforts to provide relief for Katrina victims. Members spent little time discussing the hurricane victims Wednesday, other than noting that Mason County Central teacher Phil Quinlan found a Web site that listed 13 pages of schools — many from the affected region — that listed items that the schools need. The Web site is <http://hurricanehelpforschools.gov>.

Group members instead discussed the expected needs of Mason County residents, primarily the need for warm clothing and monetary assistance to keep their utilities from being turned off when the weather turns colder.

FiveCAP Director Mary Trucks told the group that many local residents are among “the working poor” who were able to pay their utility bills last year, but who may not be able to this year when the costs rise. She also said her organization usually raises about \$12,000 to \$15,000 during its Walk For Warmth fund-raising effort in February, and uses that money to help people who are in danger of losing their heat.

Lynne Russell, director of United Way of Mason County, suggested that her organization may need to reconsider how it spends the money it collects this year.

“In my opinion, it’s important for people to have heat,” she said. One idea that was discussed Wednesday is the possibility of establishing a pool of funds that would supply money to pay heating bills for people in need. That pool may also be used to supply vouchers for people needing clothing or transportation.

Russell asked members of the group to provide her with information about similar programs their organizations provide, along with figures for the amount of money those programs spend and the number of people they assist. She plans on taking that information to her organization's next board committee meeting.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm announced Wednesday that she and 27 other governors asked Congress to provide more funding for American families who struggle to keep their homes warm.

"Congress must recognize that covering dramatic increases in natural gas and heating oil prices will pose an immense challenge for our citizens as winter arrives... Immediate emergency funding, and a significant increase in regular Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program funding for fiscal year 2006, would allow critical energy needs to be addressed before a crisis develops," the governors wrote in a letter to House and Senate leaders.

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September 28, 2005

Regulators warn about high heat bills at forum

By BILL O'BRIEN

Record-Eagle business editor

TRAVERSE CITY - The coming winter will bring soaring heating bills for Michigan residents, state utility regulators warned at a packed consumer forum Tuesday night at the Traverse Area District Library.

Consumers can expect around a 40 percent hike in natural gas costs this winter - increasing the heating bills for a typical household by an estimated \$40 to \$70 a month on top of the double-digit rate increases last winter.

"I know it's going to hurt - it's going to hurt a lot of people," said Laura Chappelle, a member of the Michigan Public Service Commission who spoke at the forum.

The high energy prices are a worrisome trend for people like Dawn Stachurski, of Traverse City, who told state officials those higher energy prices come on top of other escalating costs for health insurance, gasoline and other utility increases.

"I feel like we're being smothered," she said. "Everybody's hitting the consumer from all sides - we're battle-weary."

The MPSC is holding several public forums around Michigan this month to warn consumers about high energy costs, urging them to make arrangements for budgeting or finding assistance before their heating costs start to mount.

Chappelle said national energy markets already facing tight supplies this winter were further complicated by the impact of Hurricane Katrina on the Gulf Coast, which cut into both oil and natural gas production.

"All of our commodities are stretched really thin," Chappelle said. "We're all using an awful lot of this stuff."

Some states will see even higher increases - up to 70 percent - she said. Michigan prices will be more stable since much of the winter natural gas supply has already been purchased and is in storage by the state's major suppliers.

Officials with area service agencies say they're already getting calls from area residents concerned about meeting this winter's energy bills. Grand Traverse County Commission on Aging director Georgia Durga said her office has a senior assistance fund to help seniors on a one-time basis with emergency costs including heating bills.

Durga said the money from her office can be "leveraged" with other programs from groups like the Father Fred Foundation and the Area Agency on Aging to help eligible families get assistance.

Regulated utilities also have a winter protection plan for seniors and low-income customers that prevents service cut-offs between December and April so customers only have to pay a portion of their monthly bill during the winter, then make up the difference later.

Other eligible customers can get a home heating credit on their tax returns, and the state also has

an emergency relief program for heating and electric bills administered by the Family Independence Agency.

Assistance programs and other energy-saving tips are detailed on the commission's Web site at www.michigan.gov/mpsc.

EDITORIAL

Heating bills likely to soar with fuel prices

Battle Creek Enquirer

September 29, 2005

Energy industry officials were warning about big jumps in heating costs this winter long before Hurricanes Katrina and Rita wreaked havoc along the Gulf Coast.

Now the Michigan Public Service Commission has issued a report saying the cost of natural gas is likely to go up at least 40 percent this winter, thanks in part to hurricane damage to natural gas facilities along the Gulf of Mexico. The MPSC estimate is based on an average winter; it's scary to think what might happen if a bitterly cold season sends demand for heating fuel - and subsequently the price - even higher.

Most Michigan homes use natural gas for heat. But even other heating fuels, such as oil and propane, are increasing substantially in price.

Michigan residents need to start thinking now about how they might reduce their costs this winter. Making sure all windows and doors are well-sealed, installing insulation and turning down the thermostat are just a few ways to help cut gas consumption.

While heating bills are going to crunch everyone's budgets this winter, of greatest concern are those residents - the elderly on fixed incomes, people on public assistance, the working poor - who barely get by from month to month and have no ability to absorb a 40 percent or 50 percent increase in their utility costs.

That is why it is important that the federal government increase funding for the federal Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, which provides money for states to use in three ways: for emergency aid; for heating credits that provide payments directly to energy providers, and for weatherization assistance. Much of the money is channeled through organizations such as The Salvation Army and Community Action Agencies which then distribute it to people who meet income guidelines and other criteria.

A group of senators has proposed increasing funding for the federal program from \$2.2 billion last year to \$3.5 billion this year, while the U.S. House is considering an increase to \$4.2 billion. In addition to government aid, those of us able to can donate to private efforts such as Consumer Energy's PeopleCare program or The Heat and Warmth Fund (THAW), an organization of Michigan businesses, human services organizations, government agencies and private citizens who work with utility companies and other energy providers to ensure that the needs of the poor are met.

Last winter when many sources of heating assistance were depleted, the United Way of Battle Creek came forward with \$50,000 to address the issue - another good reason to support the current United Way fund campaign.

Heat is a necessity, not a luxury, in Michigan winters. We all must make sure that the neediest among us have the help they need to stay warm.

Originally published September 29, 2005

State Lifts Child Support Penalties

From Oct. 1 through Dec. 31, parents behind in child support payments can work out a payment plan with the state without incurring penalty fees and without punishment, announced today the author of the new law, Rep. Alexander **LIPSEY** (D-Kalamazoo).

The program allows parents with past-due child support payments to put 50 percent of the support owed down, as a "good faith" payment. The parent then has until Dec. 31 to pay the remaining support. Any accrued interest on the payments will have to be paid but any penalty fines will be waived.

"Then it's not a question of putting people in jail, or having the thumb of the government hanging over their head," Lipsey said. "It's about the kids."

Lipsey is a Democratic candidate for Attorney General. If he's successful in next year's Democratic Party caucus, he likely would run against incumbent Republican Attorney General Mike **COX**, who's made going after deadbeat parents his top issue.

The majority of people who accumulate delinquent child support payments, around 70 percent, make \$20,000 or less a year, said Jim **SEMERAD**, chairman of DADS of Michigan.

DADS supports Lipsey's legislation, which is part of a bigger package introduced last year that also supported the Child's Trust Fund Tax. The goal is to encourage delinquent parents to act in good faith, Semerad said.

How much of an incentive knocked off penalty fees and a 90-day amnesty are, is yet to be seen.

Fifty percent of the parents in question owe more than \$60,000, Semerad said. Though some of the debt can be attributed to accumulated penalties and, sometimes, mathematical system errors, asking someone to make a \$30,000 payment to start the amnesty program just isn't going to happen, Semerad said.

A lot of those living on less than \$20,000 a year have stacked up about \$40,000-\$45,000 in backed-up child support payments, Semerad said.

So why, especially if the up-front payment totaled \$20,000 or more, would anyone ever voluntarily agree to give up a year's income?

All Semerad would say about that is, "One message we really want to send is that we want people to come in and work out some reasonable arrangement with

the FOC (Friend of the Court)."

Lipsey did say that the FOC would work out some payment plan with anyone who voluntarily came forward to pay over due child support.

"This will be a fresh start for those who sincerely want to pay child support," Lipsey said.

The program is not open to people who have a history with the system, i.e. those who have recently been arrested or are currently in jail, Lipsey said.

"This is not a get out of jail free card," Lipsey said.

The FOC has sent out notices to all delinquent parents alerting them of the program. Interested parents should call 866-540-0008.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 27, 2005

Governor Granholm Calls for Extradition of Arizona Man for Unpaid Child Support

LANSING – Governor Jennifer M. Granholm today announced that she has initiated proceedings to extradite an Arizona man charged with failing to pay more than \$70,000 in child support, a felony crime punishable by four years in prison.

John Randall Baker was arrested by law enforcement officers in Mohave County, Arizona in July. In October 1995, Baker was ordered by the Wayne County Circuit Court in Michigan to pay \$190 per week for the support of his minor children but has failed to comply. As of July 2005, his unpaid child support obligations totaled \$70,889.52.

“Mr. Baker has failed to meet his responsibility to support his children, and that has consequences,” Granholm said. “The state of Michigan will use all tools at its disposal to ensure that parents provide for their children.”

Upon return to Michigan, Mr. Baker will face prosecution. In Michigan, non-support of a child is a felony punishable by up to four years in prison and/or a \$2,000 fine. Since taking office, Governor Granholm has requested the return, through the extradition process, of more than 100 parents who have failed to support their children as ordered by courts in Michigan.

Under the Uniform Criminal Extradition Act, the power to demand extradition of a fugitive who has fled from justice in Michigan and taken refuge in another state is vested in the governor. After receiving extradition documents, Arizona officials can issue a warrant delivering the fugitive into the custody of Michigan authorities.

To encourage parents to pay their past due child support, the state is offering an amnesty period beginning October 1, 2005. Under the new law, parents who owe past due child support in Michigan will have a 90-day window to avoid state criminal and civil enforcement penalties. Penalties that have already been initiated will be waived with the exception of felony prosecutions or in circumstances where a delinquent parent has already been arrested due to failure or refusal to pay past due child support.

The amnesty program does not affect current support obligations. The amnesty program was established by Public Act 584 of 2004 and sponsored by Rep. Alexander Lipsey.

For more information regarding the amnesty program, parents can contact their local Friend of the Court office, call 1-866-540-0008, or visit www.michigan.gov/dhs and click on “Child Support.”



JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
LANSING



MARIANNE UDOW
DIRECTOR

News Release

Contact: Stepheni Schlinker or Maureen Sorbet (517) 373-7394

Federal grants bring \$2.3 million to enhance domestic violence victim protection and increase service in rural counties.

September 29, 2005

A pair of federal grants will continue a state collaboration that provides increased protection to domestic violence victims and continue a rural service grant to 13 counties. The Michigan Domestic Violence and Prevention Treatment Board, a unit of state government administered through the Department of Human Services, received grants totaling \$2,372,585 from the U.S. Department of Justice.

"The funds will enable the board to upgrade protection services for domestic violence survivors and provide services in remote counties," said Marianne Udow, director of the Michigan Department of Human Services.

A two-year grant totaling \$1,472,609 will continue the **Grants to Encourage Arrest Program** in Michigan beginning Oct. 1. Through this grant the board partners with Michigan Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, Michigan State Police, the Prosecuting Attorneys Association of Michigan, Michigan Attorney General's Office and local partners to increase victim safety and batterer accountability.

Grant funds provide Attorney General assistance to prosecutors in a nine-county area to: prosecute domestic violence cases; increase the coordination between local prosecutors, state and federal law enforcement agencies; and improve the ability of local law enforcement to enforce personal protection orders and hold perpetrators accountable. The nine-county area includes Antrim, Charlevoix, Cheboygan, Emmet, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, Leelanau and Otsego counties.

"This Grant to Encourage Arrest is an important tool to assist the nine rural communities to effectively address domestic violence through the criminal justice system," said Judge Amy Krause, chair of Michigan Domestic Violence and Prevention Treatment Board.

The board was also awarded a two-year grant totaling \$899,976 to continue the **Rural Domestic Violence and Child Victimization Grant** effective Oct. 1. The funds will provide service with 10 local domestic violence programs for survivors of domestic violence and their children in 13 rural counties – Alger, Antrim, Arenac, Baraga, Benzie, Keweenaw, Lake, Missaukee, Montmorency, Oceana, Ogemaw, Ontonagon and Oscoda.

The board will again collaborate with Michigan Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence to complement its projects and provide training and technical assistance to rural programs and their community partners on issues related to domestic violence and child welfare.

For more information go to www.michigan.gov/dhs and click on "Domestic Violence".

Former SafeHouse director in court Susan McGee accused of filing false audit reports

Thursday, September 29, 2005

BY LIZ COBBS

Ann Arbor News Staff Reporter

The former director of SafeHouse Center is expected to appear in a federal court in Grand Rapids today to face a criminal charge alleging she filed a false audit report while she was in charge of the domestic violence center in Ann Arbor.

Susan McGee has been charged by the U.S. Attorney's Office with filing false statements, a charge punishable by up to five years in federal prison.

McGee is expected to be arraigned by U.S. District Magistrate Judge Hugh W. Brenneman Jr. at the U.S. District Court building in Grand Rapids. The U.S. Attorney's Office in Lansing filed the charge on Aug. 29, according to court records.

McGee had been executive director of the Domestic Violence Project/SAFE House since 1987 until she resigned in April 2002 when it was alleged that she had falsified the agency's annual audits for at least 10 years. The agency has since changed its name to SafeHouse Center.

McGee's attorney, Michael Moran, was not available for comment.

SafeHouse Board President Elizabeth McGuire also was not available for comment.

According to the felony information submitted by the U.S. Attorney's Office, McGee is charged with filing a fraudulent audit report in March 2001 to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Justice and the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services. The case is being handled in Grand Rapids because the falsified documents were filed in Ingham County, which is within the federal government's Western District jurisdiction, based in Grand Rapids.

SafeHouse had received grants from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Justice to fund programs. The federal grants were passed through the state Department of Human Services, which was then called the Family Independence Agency. As a recipient of the grant funding, SafeHouse was required to submit financial audit reports.

The U.S. Attorney's Office stated in its felony information that McGee submitted financial statements for the year 2000 to the federal and state government departments that were purportedly signed by SafeHouse's certified public accountant. The statements claimed the accountant had "issued a clean, 'unqualified opinion,' finding no material misstatements, weaknesses or non-compliance," when actually the CPA had not audited the financial statements, the felony information said.

SafeHouse launched an investigation of McGee after the agency's auditors determined McGee had been falsifying audits for at least 10 years.

An independent auditor's report released in 2003 said McGee falsified annual audits to cover delinquent federal and state payroll taxes. As a result of that, SafeHouse had to pay more than \$191,000 in penalties and interest to the federal government.

In April, the state Department of Human Services sent a letter to Safe House ordering the agency to repay \$483,856 in state funding because audits could not verify that the agency delivered services in 2000, 2002 and 2003.

There has been no evidence during the agency's investigation that McGee misappropriated money for her personal benefit.

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IN BRIEF

Jackson Citizen Patriot

Thursday, September 29, 2005

A 24-year-old Jackson man stabbed his 35-year-old ex-girlfriend during an argument Wednesday afternoon, Jackson police said.

The victim was stabbed in the stomach as she left the home of a friend in the 1000 block of Maple Avenue. She was treated and released from Foote Hospital.

The suspect fled on foot and was found shortly after, police said. He was in jail awaiting arraignment this morning.

"It was an ongoing feud. They were not together," Lt. John Holda said. "She ran into him at the house ! they started their domestic argument, she tried to leave, he followed her and then stabbed her."

He could be charged with felonious assault, Holda said.

Group: Millions of eligible people don't get food stamps

Wednesday, September 28, 2005;

Posted: 10:05 a.m. EDT (14:05 GMT)

CNN.COM

WASHINGTON (AP) -- More than 3 million needy people in big cities could be getting food stamps but don't for a variety of reasons, an anti-hunger group says.

That translates to \$2.1 billion in unused food stamps, the Food Research and Action Center said in a report scheduled for release Wednesday.

The group analyzed Census data to see how many people are eligible for food stamps in 25 large cities, then checked county or city data to see how many actually receive them -- only 62 percent, or nearly 5.4 million.

The Food Research and Action Center opposes cuts in food stamps, which lawmakers may consider as they trim \$3 billion from agriculture programs in coming weeks.

"The first thing Congress should do is not make budget cuts in the program," said Jim Weill, president of the Washington-based group.

Food stamps come in the form of a debit-style card that can be used at supermarkets and other retailers. Who qualifies is determined largely by federal rules, although states have some leeway in deciding. There are many reasons why people who qualify don't get food stamps, the report said.

Many immigrants are eligible but face language or cultural barriers or are unaware they qualify, the group said.

Some local policies are burdensome or confusing. Weill said that in Washington, D.C., people were notified that they qualified but not told they had to attend an information session on using the debit card before actually receiving the benefit.

"They sat waiting for food stamps to arrive, which they never did," Weill said. Officials later fixed the problem.

Federal dollars pay for food stamps, which are part of the Agriculture Department. States are in charge of running the food stamp program and pay about half the administrative costs. Federal authorities pay the rest.

Agriculture Department officials have worked to make the program simpler and spread the word about who's eligible, spokeswoman Terri Teuber said.

The department has given grants to local and state groups, including faith-based and community organizations, to reach out to eligible people who haven't applied, she said.

"We want to ensure that all who are eligible know about the program and receive nutrition assistance with dignity and respect," Teuber said.

Among those eligible to receive food stamps but not getting them, the widest gap was in Oakland, California, where an estimated 23 percent of eligible people in Alameda County get food stamps.

Next was San Diego County, California, with 26 percent of those eligible getting food stamps, and Houston, where an estimated 40 percent of Harris County residents got food stamps.

The highest levels of participation were in Milwaukee County, Wisconsin, and the Memphis area in Shelby County, Tennessee. In those communities, 90 percent of people eligible for food stamps received them.

Nationwide, about 25 million people get food stamps each month, according to the most recent Agriculture Department data.

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Detroit soup kitchen gets new look, chef

Goal is to provide healthful meals, better job training

September 29, 2005

BY JULIE EDGAR
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

A new state-of-the-art kitchen calls for a creative chef, one whose mission not only is turning out 15,000 healthful meals a week for people who are homeless, elderly or disabled, but also boosting the efficiency of one of the area's largest soup kitchens.

Cass Community Social Services gave the public a glimpse Wednesday of the 1,400-square-foot kitchen, which replaces its cramped, Depression-era kitchen at Cass Community United Methodist Church. The new facility is inside the Scott Building on Woodrow Wilson in Detroit. The agency also hired a new chef. Restaurateur Matt Prentice, who helped cut the kitchen's estimated construction cost of \$300,000 to \$125,000 by finding good, used equipment and contractors willing to work for free, urged Craig Stabler, the head of his catering operations, to apply to be executive chef of the soup kitchen.

Stabler, 39, of Roseville took his toque and plunged into the new full-time job. He has spent the past week visiting area food banks to glean the fresh fruits and vegetables that have been absent from the menu, ingredients he plans to fashion into tastier and more healthful dishes to replace the boxed macaroni-and-cheese and canned beef stew that have been staples at the kitchen.

With donated venison, he may make a spaghetti sauce. He'll be doing chicken potpie. Chili. Meat stew. He's thinking about what to do with the apples, carrots, cream and pita bread he's collected.

"It's been pounded into me to think profit, costs, percentages. This is different. But at the same time, I'm bringing something fresh to this. I want to treat this like it's a profit operation, work on an established price-per-meal. I can also teach my employees how a business is run," Stabler said Wednesday.

Meals are served to homebound seniors, homeless veterans, a women's shelter and to low- and no-income residents of the Scott Building.

The Rev. Faith Fowler of Cass Community United Methodist said the social services agency may sign a contract soon to provide 900 meals a week to a charter school with five locations in the area. She declined to name the school.

"One of the things we know about our community is, people aren't eating or exercising properly. Our school-age kids aren't eating the way they should be, so this is a chance to impact the community, even though it's a secondary goal," she said. Cass Community Social Services also has a culinary training program for low- and no-income people, which Stabler will run. Fowler said graduates will now be able to say they know their way around a convection oven and a meat slicer, basics missing from the old kitchen.

Serving the community

A drop-in meal service is available from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. daily at Cass Community Social Services in the Scott Building, 11850 Woodrow Wilson St., west of the Lodge Freeway near Webb. Breakfast and dinner are available for people using the rotating shelter. **If you'd like to help**

To donate money, write a check payable to Cass Community Social Services and send to 11850 Woodrow Wilson St., Detroit 48206. Please put it to the attention of the Rev. Faith Fowler. To donate goods, call 313-883-2277 anytime to coordinate with Executive Chef Craig Stabler. **By Julie Edgar**

Contact JULIE EDGAR at 248-351-3294 or edgar@freepress.com.

Published September 29, 2005

Eaton judge steps aside in ex-guardian's contempt trial

Action avoids potential conflict in Zwick case

By Kelly Hassett
Lansing State Journal

County's head probate judge has disqualified himself from overseeing the contempt trial of Charles M. Zwick because he has issued judgments against him for the same cases, court documents state.

Chief Probate Judge Michael Skinner presided over dozens of cases handled by Zwick, who's jailed on charges he mishandled more than \$630,000 from two elderly Lansing sisters' accounts. Last month Skinner issued judgments against Zwick after the family of Wilma Southwell and Alice Grahm filed complaints that the former Eaton County court guardian failed to account for the missing money.

Southwell died at age 92, and Grahm, who is 84, has Alzheimer's disease.

In papers dated Monday and filed in Eaton County court, Skinner wrote, "I have already entered civil judgments against Mr. Zwick in these cases that are based upon the same facts that give rise to the contempt allegations."

Disqualifying himself eliminates the possibility or appearance of a conflict of interest. The state court administrators office will now decide who presides over the cases.

Frank Reynolds, a special prosecutor assigned to the probate contempt cases, said Wednesday that he had not received official notice of disqualification.

Zwick faces up to 30 days in jail and a \$250 fine.

Zwick, who's also the target of a federal criminal probe, could not be reached for comment because the county jail does not take phone messages for inmates. He has not responded to a letter seeking an interview, and his attorneys did not return a call seeking comment Wednesday. Phil Vilella, the attorney representing Southwell's and Grahm's relatives, has been seeking ways to recover the money. "I don't think it affects me or my cases or clients," Vilella said of the change in judges.

What's next

- The probate court contempt trial for Charles M. Zwick is scheduled for Nov. 8 in the Wilma Southwell case.
- A trial date for the Alice Grahm case has not been set. The family accuses the Charlotte attorney of mishandling more than \$630,000 from the Lansing sisters' accounts.

Contact Kelly Hassett at 267-1301 or khassett@lsj.com.

Published September 29, 2005

Police imposters targeting elderly Ingham authorities warn of scam after woman loses \$9K

By Sally Trout
Lansing State Journal

DELHI TWP. - Two people posing as police officers tricked an 83-year-old woman into giving them more than \$9,000, Ingham County sheriff's officials said - and it likely wasn't their first time preying on the elderly.

"We are finding similar scams taking place all over the state, especially in the Grand Rapids area," Lt. Jeff Joy said. "But this is the first one this year for our department."

A man and a woman dressed in black and wearing star-shaped badges on chains approached the woman Saturday as she returned home, Joy said, and offered to carry her groceries.

Here's what happened next, according to Joy:

Once inside her home, they told the woman they were investigating counterfeit money and asked if she had any cash they could check.

After she showed them \$150, they asked to see her bank records. They then drove her to an unidentified bank and persuaded her to withdraw more than \$9,000.

The victim gave the cash to the man, who appeared to put it in a bank bag. He gave the bag to her and said an officer would come and fingerprint it. The imposters then took the woman home.

After no one came, the woman opened the bag and found only shredded paper.

Tri-County Office on Aging Director Marion Owen warns seniors to be wary of people seeking personal or financial information.

"People should be especially careful when a stranger knocks on their door claiming to be from an official agency," she said.

Senior safety

Authorities still are looking for the pair who committed this scam. To avoid being a victim:

- Install a door peephole.
- Never let strangers inside.
- Check identification for delivery and service people.
- For more tips, visit www.aarp.org.

Contact Sally Trout at 377-1040 or strout@lsj.com.

Ex-senator Dole touts new Medicare drug plan

September 29, 2005

BY KIM NORRIS
FREE PRESS BUSINESS WRITER

Mary Ames of Rochester Hills just started taking a cancer medication that costs \$2,400 a year. She and her husband, Kenneth, receive prescription-drug coverage through his former employer.

But the couple have to pay a \$400 deductible apiece before the plan picks up 80% of their remaining costs and there's no guarantee the coverage would be there indefinitely.

Ames is haunted by reminders of her mother, who died of cancer, and her father, who spent every penny caring for her and buying medications. She knows her father would have benefited from Medicare's new prescription-drug program that is to take effect Jan. 1. That why the Amesese came to the Older Persons' Commission facility in Rochester on Wednesday to hear former senator and one-time presidential candidate Bob Dole pitch the new plan to hundreds of seniors.

"One of the myths I want to dispel is that people over 65 can't make good choices," Dole, 82, told the assembly. "Seniors are able to make very sophisticated choices."

Dates to remember

Beginning Saturday: Medicare beneficiaries are to begin receiving information about specific drug plans available in their areas.

Nov. 15: Sign-up for the programs begins.

Dec. 31: Michigan's EPIC (Elder Prescription Insurance Coverage) program, which provides prescription drugs to Michigan's low-income seniors, ends. If participants haven't joined a new drug plan, they'll be left without coverage.

May 15, 2006: The last day to sign up for a prescription plan without paying a penalty on premiums. Some exceptions to this deadline will be allowed, depending on circumstances.

Source: Michigan Medicare/Medicaid Assistance Program

Where to go for help on choosing plan

Contact the Michigan Medicare/Medicaid Assistance Program. It will have 700 trained counselors on hand to

answer calls Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Fifty-eight sites operate through 16 Area Agencies on Aging across the state. Appointments are available for one-on-one consultations. Phone 800-803-7174 or log on to www.mymmap.org. Calls will be routed to your local site. Call the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid at 800-633-4227 -- 9,000 customer service reps staff the lines 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Check the Internet at www.medicare.gov where a calculator helps Medicare recipients determine whether a basic plan is cheaper for them than not doing anything and just paying as they go.

Come back Friday

Before you rush out to sign up for any of the prescription drug packages, what do you need to know? Come back to the Free Press on Friday for a Q&A on the new law and how it could affect you.

He was accompanied by Leslie Norwalk, assistant director of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS), who did most of the heavy lifting when it came to describing the new prescription-drug benefit that is to begin enrollment Nov. 15.

Ann Herman said she and her husband, Jerome, had received health-care coverage through a union plan since he retired in 1988.

But that's ending this year, and the 74-year-old Shelby Township resident said her husband's medications cost about \$500 a month and hers about \$172.

"In my situation, the Medicare program sounds good. I will be investigating," she said.

Beginning in October, beneficiaries will be bombarded with information from former employers, health care plans and the federal government kicking off the new benefit.

In Michigan, there 17 federally approved health plans offering 20 prescription-drug programs.

If you qualify for Medicare, you qualify for the benefit, although there is a cost. Monthly premiums will vary depending where you live, the type of coverage, the deductibles and the co-payments.

CMS has estimated premiums will average about \$32 nationwide, but Norwalk said Michiganders have at least one plan available that costs less than \$15 a month for basic coverage.

There are 1.5 million Medicare beneficiaries in Michigan, including 300,000 in southeastern Michigan, who will have to make some kind of choice about prescription-drug coverage -- even if the choice is to do nothing for the moment.

Grateful as she is for the coverage, Ames is a little overwhelmed by the options that are out there.

"There are so many parts to it and so many plans to choose from."

She was comforted by the fact that CMS has trained 9,000 customer service representatives to answer questions around the clock.

Dole told the Free Press he often hears seniors express concerns that "we are going to get inundated with too much information. Everyone is trying to be helpful."

In addition to CMS's hotline, there are hundreds of local reps throughout the states.

The local Michigan Medicare/Medicaid Assistance Program, which is approved by CMS, has sites around the state staffed with people to answer questions. Beneficiaries can even make appointments to speak with someone in person at a site close to them.

Norwalk touched on the key points:

- The prescription drug benefit is available to all Medicare beneficiaries as of Jan. 1.

- People with limited incomes can get extra help, including having to pay little or nothing. And there is help available immediately to them.

- Retirees who have health coverage through their union or employer will have to determine if the Medicare plan is better than what they have. They should receive letters from their health plan before Nov. 15 telling them whether or not they have similar -- or creditable coverage. They need not change anything if they do.

- There is a penalty for people who do not enroll in the plan in the first year. The penalty does not apply to people who lose coverage they had or to newly eligible enrollees.

- Catastrophic coverage -- Medicare will pay 95% of the bill when you have spent more than \$3,600.

- CMS reimburses employers 28% of the cost (up to \$2,500) of employers for retirees to encourage them to stay in the game, Norwalk said. Employers have to sign up for subsidy payments.

- Open enrollment runs from Nov. 15 to May 15. People who want coverage starting Jan. 1 must sign up by Dec. 31.

- The program is voluntary.

Contact KIM NORRIS at 248-351-5186 or norris@freepress.com.

Custody Changes Require Evaluation

A court cannot automatically conclude that if a parent moves 100 miles or more away from another parent, custody should be given automatically to the parent who didn't move.

In *Matthew **SEHLKE** v Jennifer **VANDERMAAS***, No. 262346, Sehlke and Vandermaas, of DeWitt, got in a custody battle when Vandermaas, moved to Lexington. Originally when the two separated, the court awarded 50/50 custody with an order to have the child live with Vandermaas. At the time of the order, both parents lived in DeWitt County and agreed that when their son was old enough to go to school, he would go to DeWitt schools.

In March, Sehlke asked for a custody change, since Vandermaas and their son had moved to Lexington, which is approximately 140 miles away, he wouldn't get to see his son as often.

The trial court ruled that the move was enough to warrant new custody guidelines for Sehlke and Vandermaas because Vandermaas violated a guideline that said a parent needed the court's consent to move more than 100 miles away from the other parent.

The court also ruled it would be in the child's best interest to move in with his father and stay in DeWitt County.

Vandermaas appealed, stating that the court prematurely made its decision and did so without hearing any evidence.

The Court of Appeals agreed that moving a child away from the other parent at a distance greater than 100 miles constituted a change of circumstance, which must be evaluated by the court. However, the trial court made the custody decision without determining if the custody change was in the child's best interest.

The appeals court ruled Vandermaas' violation of the rule was enough to warrant a custody change but sent the case back to the trial court, ordering the trial court to effectively determine if the change was in the child's best interest.

"In short, the trial court should have waited to take up the matter of the actual request for a change in custody," the court opined. "Accordingly, we reverse the order granting a change in custody and remand the matter to the trial court to set the matter for an evidentiary hearing on the change in custody

issue, preceded by a referral to the Friend of the Court for investigation and report if appropriate."

The decision was signed by Appellate Judges David **SAWYER**, Michael **TALBOT**, Stephen **BORRELLO**.

(Discuss This Topic | 0 Comments)

Information Pertinent to Legislative and State Department Activities
Since 1906

REPORT NO. 188 VOLUME 44 WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 2005

HOUSE APPROVES \$1 B. JOBS PLAN

A \$1 billion plan to give Michigan some economic punch in the high tech, life sciences, alternative energy and defense fields was given near-unanimous approval by the House on Wednesday. Although the plan, which grew out of Governor Jennifer Granholm's initial proposal for a \$2 billion bond issue, is envisioned as a way to provide a quick jobs boost, the first use of the money is not anticipated until some time early next year.

The plan would securitize – sell to investors – about a third of the state's remaining \$6.2 billion in tobacco settlement funds it is to receive over the next 20 years. How much is required to reach the \$1 billion mark depends on market conditions, with consultants estimating the state will get anywhere from 50 cents to 70 cents on each tobacco settlement dollar.

The \$280 million the state receives annually under the settlement, which now goes to the Michigan Merit Scholarship program and Medicaid, would be reduced to about \$175 million.

Rep. Bill Huizenga (R-Zeeland), who paid tribute to Rep. Andy Dillon (D-Redford) for helping to devise the securitization approach, said the plan “injects \$1 billion into new and growing areas. Today, we take a very important step to bringing Michigan's economy back and creating jobs for people living here.”

The package creates the 21st Century Jobs Trust Fund within a renamed Michigan Strategic Fund that would be transferred to the Department of Treasury from the Department of Labor and Economic Growth.

The money would be handed out in grants and loans under two separate entities in HB 5047: a new 19-member strategic economic investment board would award money for commercialization of high tech, alternative energy, life sciences and homeland security ventures; the renamed Strategic Fund board (temporarily expanded by two members to 11) would hand out loans and award grants in private equity capital projects and through an economic stimulus program.

No more than 70 percent of the securitized funds could be used by the investment board; economic stimulus loans could eat up no more than 25 percent and the venture capital program would be capped at 40 percent.

SB 533, reworked from a Senate version that called for a \$1 billion bond proposal, creates the new 19-member board that will direct the spending of the competitive edge

technologies. It is directed to select those applicants that have a high probability to create jobs in Michigan and they must leverage other funds.

Ms. Granholm, who earlier traded insults with House Speaker Craig DeRoche (R-Novi) regarding the timing of the vote, said she was “thrilled” with the House action and expects it to be strengthened in the Senate. “In the end, we know we’ll get a package that creates jobs now and diversifies our economy in the future. This is the first step – we’ve got three more, but we’re encouraged,” she said.

Mr. DeRoche, who views the jobs plan and the House-passed business tax cut as one package, said the securitization funds offer some hope of longer-term impact, but that the most immediate help will be from tax cuts. “That will give us a fighting chance to get out of last place,” he said in an apparent reference to Michigan’s status as the state with the worst unemployment rate.

The securitization funds, Mr. DeRoche added, will provide an incentive for advanced technology and other targeted businesses to take risks they might not otherwise take and may serve to attract out of state firms to invest in Michigan.

House Minority Leader Diane Byrum (D-Onondaga) said the package “will have a very positive impact. It will go a long way toward diversifying the Michigan economy and cause businesses to invest in this state.”

Companies receiving funds would have to abide by “measurable milestones” and clear objectives, and would be required to repay any public funds they received if they left the state within seven years.

Annual review of the contracts by the auditor general would be required and the legislation requires the board to work with a new compliance officer who would report to the Administrative Board, which is made up of representatives of the governor as well as the elected attorney general and secretary of state and the superintendent of public instruction. The compliance officer position is to be created in later legislation.

The House approved an amendment requiring the participation of at least one Michigan bank in the securitization transaction, which will require using three banks.

Although the bills are linked to the business tax cuts the Democrats opposed, Ms. Byrum said revisions are expected from Senate Republicans who shared similar concerns about the impact on the budget. “We can still support restructuring business taxes. We just have to wait and see what comes back from the Senate,” she said.

Ms. Granholm had decried the tax cut plan as irresponsible and Senate Republicans have said they need to take a careful look at how it would affect the 2005-06 budget.

Mr. DeRoche said with passage of the \$1 billion securitization plan, he can now work with the Senate on resolving issues in the tax package.

The only opposition vote cast on some of the bills came from Rep. Bob Gosselin (R-Troy) who said the better approach would have been to cut spending more in order to give all businesses lower taxes. "I'm not for government helping businesses through grants," he said.

Other bills in the stimulus package, which are all tie-barred, are HB 5048, HB 5109, HB 5108, HB 4972, HB 4973, SB 298, SB 359 and SB 521.

Michigan Report

September 28, 2005

LAWMAKERS URGE GRANHOLM: GO SLOW ON SAME-SEX BENEFITS

Anticipating an appeal of a circuit court decision that said benefits could be provided same-sex couples who are public employees, several Republican legislators urged Governor Jennifer Granholm not to move too quickly on implementing those benefits.

A religious-based conservative organization also sent out emails assuring its supporters that it could expect Michigan's Supreme Court would overturn the decision issued Tuesday by Ingham Circuit Judge Joyce Draganchuk.

Gary Glenn of the American Family Association of Michigan charged that Ms. Draganchuk's ruling was predictable given that she had been endorsed by gay rights groups.

Ms. Draganchuk said the ability of a public employer to offer benefits to same-sex couples was a matter of employment and not a matter of law or the legal definition of a married couple. Her ruling overturned an opinion issued earlier this year by Attorney General Mike Cox that a constitutional amendment adopted in 2004 defining marriage as between a man and woman only, and outlawing any other type of union to be considered as marriage, prohibited public employers from offering benefits to same-sex couples.

After the ruling, a spokesperson for Ms. Granholm said she wanted to move ahead with implementing health care benefits for state workers in same-sex couples. The benefits were negotiated in 2004, but the administration held off implementing them until a court ruled on the issue.

But House Speaker Craig DeRoche (R-Novi) said it would be folly for the administration to move forward until the issue is ultimately resolved by the Supreme Court.

Mr. DeRoche called the court decision the work of an "activist judge trying to legislate" and violating the clear intent of voters. He said Governor Jennifer Granholm should ask Attorney General Mike Cox, whose opinion saying public employers are prohibited from offering benefits sparked the court case, to appeal the Draganchuk decision to "defend the state's position."

"I hope they take this up to the Supreme Court so there is clear position," Mr. DeRoche said. "The voters were clear on the issue and the words are clear."

A spokesperson for Mr. Cox said the attorney general is still reviewing the decision, issued late Tuesday, and had not decided whether it would be appealed.

Sen. Alan Cropsey (R-DeWitt) said the circuit court is not the final court on the issue. Decisions by the Court of Appeals and Supreme Court are to be expected, he said, so the administration should not move ahead until those courts have ruled.

Kalamazoo Gazette

September 29, 2005

County should fund juvenile home

With all the taxes we pay to the county, why can't our county commissioners pay for the juvenile home themselves? They seem to be able to find money for every proposal presented by the Chamber of Commerce and every other special-interest group. If the county would fund the cost of the juvenile home, maybe voters would be more likely to approve a millage for the jail. Further, if they have to pay for the juvenile home, they might take a harder look at the proposal to make sure there are no unnecessary costs. Architects love to add expensive artistic touches, and administrators are tempted to push for as much as they can get. With taxpayers potentially footing the bill with new tax money, it is easy for commissioners to approve an expensive project. If they have to find the money in their own budget, rather than ours, it would give commissioners an incentive to be frugal.

Valerie O'Brien

Augusta

Battle Creek Enquirer

September 28, 2005

EDITORIAL

High price for preschool: Michigan can't afford to expand

Legislation being developed by Democrats in the Michigan House of Representatives seeks to make preschool available to all 4-year-old children in the state over the next five years, helping to ensure their readiness to enter kindergarten.

Supporters of the plan want to expand the Michigan School Readiness Program to include children from middle-class families who do not qualify for federal and state programs yet can't afford private preschools.

It is a laudable goal, but a very expensive endeavor. At a time when Michigan is struggling to adequately finance K-12 education, not to mention its community colleges and universities, we think it is unrealistic to expect the state to take on an additional financial burden. According to supporters' own projections, it would cost \$85 million in the first year to increase preschool enrollment from 25,000 to 50,000. By the fifth year, the annual cost is estimated at \$400 million. Because the proposed legislation could nearly double the number of children enrolled in preschool, it also contains provisions to increase the number of preschool teachers by providing scholarships for training in early childhood education.

We appreciate the importance of early childhood education and the need to provide our children with the stimulation they need for their brains and bodies to develop properly. But many parents already do that without the benefit of a formal preschool program.

In addition, the federal Head Start program serves the children of families at or below the poverty line, which is \$19,350 for a family of four. For those working families who are just above the poverty line, the state school readiness program is available. Together, the programs serve about 61,000 children this year.

Proponents of expanding the state program say nearly 60,000 preschoolers are not enrolled in a private or government-subsidized preschool program. While some of them might benefit from enrollment in such a program, it is wrong to assume that all of them are at-risk if they do not go through preschool before enrolling in kindergarten.

While supporters say the legislation would save the state money in the long run by reducing future needs for special education and expenses such as welfare, they offer no suggestions for the more immediate need of how to finance their proposed expansion of the state system. We certainly would not want to see it happen at the expense of other educational programs.

Comprehensive preschool for all children is a good idea, but it is an idea that the state simply cannot afford right now.

Originally published September 28, 2005

County groups coordinate aid

Community, religious and government units unite in hurricane relief efforts

Thursday, September 29, 2005

BY CATHERINE O'DONNELL
Ann Arbor News Staff Reporter

No one's sure how deeply the Katrina crisis will affect Washtenaw County, but county government, private social service agencies, community groups and local religious groups are teaming to help evacuees.

At a meeting Wednesday night at First Presbyterian Church in Ann Arbor, core organizers explained a Katrina plan to representatives from about 20 religious groups in the area.

Under the local plan, each evacuee family or individual is being assigned a caseworker who will be the liaison between them and a group that wishes to help. The group's commitment, says material handed out at the meeting, "will be a minimum of six months and may even exceed a year." Responsibilities of the helping group could include such things as transportation, clothing and household goods, help in finding temporary or permanent jobs, and financial support.

Each family's needs are different, and while most evacuees wish to return to their homes in the Gulf region and most likely will, it's not clear how long local needs will last, said Dale Wanty, director of social services for the Salvation Army in Washtenaw County and coordinator of Katrina caseworkers.

Wanty said Katrina caught local agencies off guard, but a good result of the effort is that government and social service agencies are learning more about working together.

The meeting Wednesday evening was led by representatives from Washtenaw County, Michigan State University Extension, the Salvation Army and Power Inc., a faith-based community development corporation in Ypsilanti.

To coordinate and track local Katrina efforts, Washtenaw County has added a set of pages to its Web site. They are grouped at www.ewashtenaw.org/katrina. Headings include housing, schools, jobs, child care, transportation, legal services, clothing and household needs and donations.

Before the meeting, representatives from several congregations said they have resources and wish to help but they weren't sure what to do. Some religious groups plan team efforts. Susan MacDermaid and Angela Williams, members of St. Aidan's Episcopal Church, said their congregation may link with Northside Presbyterian Church, their neighbor on Broadway, to help Katrina evacuees.

The Katrina leadership team will re-present their material, along with updates, at a second meeting for religious and other local groups 7 to 9 p.m. Wednesday at First Presbyterian.

Catherine O'Donnell can be reached at codonnell@annarbornews.com or (734) 994-6831.

Evacuees have a new blessing: A baby girl

September 29, 2005

BY FRANK WITSIL
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Someday, Latasha Wooten said, she will tell her newborn daughter, Charleah Myracle Lorio, the story of how she came to be a Detroit native. She will also tell her why when the 7-pound, 8-ounce girl came into the world Wednesday, it was "the most blessed moment ever."

Charleah may be the first baby born to New Orleans evacuees in Michigan, a state emergency management official said.

Wooten, 24, said she weathered Hurricane Katrina in her second-floor Jefferson Parish apartment with Charleah's father, Charles Lorio, and her other daughter, 7-year old Debranae Phillips.

When Katrina hit on Aug. 29, the heavy rains pounded the roof, then winds rattled and ultimately blew it off.

The next day, with no hope they could stay, Wooten said, the family left New Orleans and drove more than 1,000 miles to Michigan, where Lorio has distant relatives. They found shelter in a room at the Ramada Inn in Southfield.

"It was scary," said Lorio, a 22-year-old New Orleans native who, until he left Louisiana last month, had never been outside the state. "I thought she was going to have the baby when we were going through the storm. But, she held on until we got to a safe place."

And at 7:09 a.m. Wednesday, Charleah was born at Hutzel Hospital in Detroit.

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Lansing State Journal

September 29, 2005

Letters

Help the locals

While it is commendable that people here and elsewhere are giving shelter to victims of Hurricane Katrina, let's remember the difficulties others have in finding housing. There are residents in the Mason area who also need shelter immediately. A senior friend is finding that affordable housing in Mason is more than difficult, due to the long waiting lists for subsidized housing. There is a desperate need to generate adequate, affordable housing for the homeless in our area. More resources should be available for such persons. Having a home is a basic and primary human need, regardless of income and social status.

Dolores Cook

Mason

Donated supplies go to needy kids

Thursday, September 29, 2005

By Michael Buck
The Grand Rapids Press

KENTWOOD -- Some classrooms have extra pencils in case students needs them. At East Kelloggsville Elementary, teachers can now hand out entire backpacks of supplies. SBC Pioneers, a charitable organization linked with the communications company, delivered 90 backpacks to the school this week.

The backpacks will be handed out to students on an "as needed" basis.

"The backpacks are filled with paper, pencils, crayons -- basic supplies the kids can use," said John Schwartz, director of external affairs for SBC Michigan.

The donated backpacks are part of the Pioneers' Tools for Learning charity drive. Principal Martin Alexander arranged for the packs to go to students who needed them the most. The SBC Pioneers is a division of the Telecom Pioneers, which has been involved in charity work since 1911. June Harrington, secretary-treasurer of Pioneers affiliate Grand Rapids Grand Valley Association, said Tools for Learning is the group's biggest program in the area.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Kalamazoo Gazette

Wednesday, September 28, 2005

Poverty exposed by hurricane

Hurricane Katrina has exposed the dark underside of American society. Years ago, Michael Harrington wrote that the poor are invisible and, therefore, we ignore them. Now, a hurricane has suddenly exposed to the world that the United States has millions who live lives that disgrace a country that is the richest in history and spends millions on ill-advised foreign adventures. While we ignore the starving millions in Africa, we give billions to Egypt, and billions to Israel because they are major players in the oil-rich Mideast. While we talk about our devotion to democracy and human rights, we ignore the oppressed and needy millions who live in parts of the world where we have no economic interests -- or worse, where private U.S. corporations profit hugely from keeping those people in what amounts to 20th century, western slavery.

Terry Quinn

Marcellus

Teachers say poverty, low family education make hard learners

Thursday, September 29, 2005

Bay City Times Editorial

A survey released this month points to some disturbing thoughts among Michigan's public school teachers.

Half the 1,016 teachers in the telephone survey said they believe that some educators are so frustrated trying to teach poor students that they just give up on the students.

The survey was not commissioned by any group out to make a point. EPIC-MRA, a Lansing polling company, conducted the survey to discover what teachers found frustrating in the classroom.

The results of this survey deserve a closer - and careful - look.

First of all, the survey didn't say, flat-out, that teachers are in fact giving up on poor kids.

It says half the surveyed teachers think that, because it's so frustrating teaching kids from different cultural backgrounds, teachers give up on them "a lot" or "some."

In the Bay area and Northeast Michigan, we can't say we've seen teachers give up on students - certainly not a lot of the time, not even some of the time.

But it's not hard to imagine the frustration of trying to get kids up to speed if you don't understand why they aren't learning.

Notably, teachers ranked race and language differences among students as low on a list of what they think contributes to hard-to-teach kids.

The largest factors, by far, were family income and family educational background.

As teachers see it, students from poor families, or from families whose members aren't well-schooled tend not to do well in school.

This survey points to a knowledge gap that educators must find a way to bridge.

Unless you've been impoverished, with a family that hasn't ever pushed its children to excel in school, the problems, the hurdles that poor people face are difficult to comprehend.

Officials at the Bay-Arenac ISD, the intermediate school district, say that they can help schools and districts understand poverty and how it affects student's success in the classroom.

Also, some savvy educators locally are trying their best to understand poverty.

And then overcome that obstacle in the classroom.

Washington Elementary School in Bay City, for example, has 70 percent of its students getting free or reduced-price lunches because of their families' low incomes.

There, Principal Kimberly Prime used grant money this year to buy all teachers the book "A Framework for Understanding Poverty," by Ruby K. Payne.

It's a good step toward trying to get a grip on what makes poor kids tick.

And learning how to teach them.

- Our View is the editorial opinion of The Bay City Times, as determined by the newspaper's editorial board, which includes the editorial page editor, the editor and the publisher.

Executive Staff
Karen Stock

(from Marianne Udow)

PHSA Week



APHSA
American Public Human Services Association

in Washington

September 23, 2005 · Volume XXVI · No. 33

Emergency TANF Bill Becomes Law

On September 21, President Bush signed H.R. 3672, which allows states serving Hurricane Katrina evacuees with short-term assistance to draw from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) contingency fund. Under the measure, which is now P.L. 109-68, states would not be required to pay a match or meet the 100 percent maintenance-of-effort requirement to access the contingency fund. For states to qualify for reimbursement for payment of these short-term cash benefits to evacuees, the evacuee may not be receiving cash benefits from the home state. The legislation also provides a grant for up to a 20 percent increase in TANF funds for Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana. It also waives certain requirements and penalties associated with TANF time limits and work requirements for the three affected states. The legislation's text is available at <http://thomas.loc.gov/>. The Office of Family Assistance (OFA) has been holding conference calls with states in preparation for issuing a Program Instruction that is scheduled for next week. OFA has also posted initial advice for states serving evacuees at <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/hurricane.htm>.

APHSA Supports Emergency Health Care Legislation

On September 21, APHSA sent a letter of support to Senate Finance Committee Chairman Charles Grassley (R-Iowa) and Ranking Member Max Baucus (D-Mont.) regarding the Emergency Health Care Relief Act of 2005, S. 1716. In the letter, APHSA Executive Director Jerry Friedman expressed strong support for provisions in the bill that would give states 100 percent federal match for medical assistance provided to Hurricane Katrina evacuees and hold states harmless from scheduled reductions in federal match for fiscal year 2006. The letter also encourages special attention to Medicare Part D implementation in affected states. It also supports the TANF provisions included in S. 1716, particularly an increase in resources to directly affected states, access to the TANF contingency funds, and simplified administrative and penalty procedures. Also on September 21, the National Governors Association sent a similar letter that specifically supported the bill's 100 percent federal match.

Congress Passes Katrina Evacuee Tax Legislation

On September 21, the House and Senate passed H.R. 3768, the Katrina Emergency Tax Relief Act of 2005. The legislation aims to provide immediate tax relief to Hurricane Katrina victims and to spur commercial investment. It includes several provisions aimed at lower-income families such as modifying the Work Opportunity Tax Credit and the Earned Income Tax Credit. The bill creates a new category of individuals, "Hurricane Katrina Employee," under the tax credit that

currently includes residents of empowerment zones, TANF-eligible families, high-risk youth, veterans, Supplemental Security Income beneficiaries, and vocational rehabilitation referrals. It allows the credit for any employee from the core disaster area who is hired by an employer in the core disaster area within a two-year period, starting from August 28, 2005. A shorter-term category was also created for any individual who was living in the core disaster area and is hired before the end of 2005, regardless of the employer's location. The bill gives the Department of the Treasury authority to ensure that taxpayers do not lose deductions, credits, or filing status because of dislocations from Hurricane Katrina. It allows low-income working families an election to use prior-year income for the refundable earned income credit and the child tax credit.

House, Senate OK Emergency Employment Grant Bills

On September 20, the House unanimously approved the Flexibility for Displaced Workers Act, H.R. 3761. The legislation, introduced by Rep. Charles Boustany (R-La.), will help displaced Gulf Coast workers seeking employment and training through the U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL) National Emergency Grant (NEG) program. The bill gives additional flexibility under the NEG program to provide temporary disaster relief and employment and training help to victims in the Gulf Coast region. DOL has already issued \$191 million in emergency grants to states, and there are no additional resources authorized under the bill. H.R. 3761 will make NEG funds available to displaced workers for employment projects outside the designated Hurricane Katrina disaster area. It requires the secretary of labor to give priority to states in which areas have suffered major disaster, and second the remaining states that have been most heavily impacted. It allows NEG funds to be used to provide displaced workers with public sector jobs for up to six months; expands NEG eligibility to displaced individuals unemployed at the time of the disaster as well as those with no prior work history; and authorizes NEG payments to Gulf Coast residents not eligible for unemployment compensation or whose unemployment compensation has expired and who are participating in re-employment activities. On September 21, the Senate passed a similar version of the House-passed bill by unanimous consent. The legislation has been sent to the president for signature.

House Approves Head Start Reauthorization Bill

On September 22, the House approved the School Readiness Act of 2005 (H.R. 2123), by a vote of 231-184. The bill would reauthorize the Head Start program for six years with funding of \$6.899 billion for FY 2006. The bill would make numerous changes to the program, including increasing the requirements that current Head Start

grantees must meet to receive "priority" consideration for grant renewal; providing each state a grant to establish a State Early Learning Council to increase collaboration among early childhood programs; and increasing teacher qualification requirements. H.R. 2123 does not contain the controversial state demonstration project included in the 2003 House Head Start reauthorization bill, under which eight states would have received the Head Start funds that would otherwise go to grantees in the state to operate state or local demonstration projects consistent with the purposes of Head Start. The bill includes an amendment offered by Rep. Charles Boustany (R-La.) that would allow faith-based organizations operating Head Start programs to consider religion in hiring. Other adopted amendments would direct Head Start programs to increase outreach to homeless and foster children and require HHS to provide a package of Hurricane Katrina assistance including additional resources to Head Start agencies in the affected areas, waiver of documentation requirements for evacuees for six months, and authority to exempt affected Head Start agencies from providing their local match. The Senate's Head Start reauthorization bill, S. 1107, was passed by the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee on May 25 and awaits a Senate floor vote.

Community Services Block Grant Emergency Bill

On September 21, Senators Michael Enzi and Edward Kennedy introduced S. 1745, the Community Services Disaster Assistance Act. The bill would expand the availability of resources under the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) for those affected by Hurricane Katrina. It would authorize states to transfer a portion of their CSBG administrative or discretionary funds to the Gulf Coast states. It also would establish a temporary income eligibility waiver for services funded by CSBG in places designated as disaster areas so evacuees will get services even if they no longer have the correct paperwork.

GOP Group Issues Medicaid Offset Proposals

On September 21, the House Republican Study Committee released a list of proposals labeled Operation Offset, containing numerous suggestions for offsetting the federal costs for Hurricane Katrina relief. The report proposes 10-year savings of \$1.2 trillion in program cuts and terminations across policy areas and federal initiatives, with \$450 billion coming from Medicaid, Medicare, and the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). Operation Offset proposes a one-year delay for the implementation of the Medicare Part D prescription drug benefit, which would yield an estimated \$30.8 billion savings over 10 years. The proposal also suggests applying a cap on Medicaid administrative costs, increasing allowable Medicaid co-payment amounts, and block-granting the federal share for Medicaid acute care services. It also proposes a 5 percent increase in Medicare Part B premiums (from 25 percent to 30 percent); restructuring Medicare's cost-sharing requirements (to include a single deductible for Medicare Part A and B Services, a uniform 20 percent coinsurance rate, and an annual per-beneficiary cap on total cost-sharing liability); and imposing a 10 percent co-pay for Medicare home health services. Operation Offset also proposes eliminating coverage for childless adults under SCHIP and ending the redistribution of any unspent federal funding for SCHIP.

NCD Issues Post-Katrina Disability Recommendations

On September 19, the National Council on Disability (NCD) sent a letter to Michael Chertoff, secretary of the Department of Homeland

Security, outlining a series of recommendations to meet the needs of the large number of Hurricane Katrina evacuees with disabilities. The letter emphasized the need for urgent action to provide necessary life-sustaining supports and services for this population in both the short and long term. NCD's short-term recommendations include the establishment of a point person on disability who will report to the secretary and provide operation leadership, oversight, advice, and coordination for "emergency preparedness, disaster relief, and recovery" on behalf of individuals with disabilities. NCD also recommends the development and implementation of a Federal Disability Recovery Plan for Hurricane Katrina; creation of a Hurricane Katrina Disability Access Advisory Group; and use of all available personnel to provide funding and resources aimed at meeting the needs of Katrina survivors with disabilities. Long-term recommendations include ensuring the necessary resources, equipment, and training to address the needs of individuals with disabilities; training personnel on the needs of the disability population; and requiring that all new construction be fully applicable and employ the principles of universal design. The letter is available at http://www.ncd.gov/newsroom/correspondence/2005/chertoff_09-19-05.htm.

HHS Awards FY 2004 Adoption Incentive Payments

On September 20, HHS announced \$14.5 million in adoption incentive payments to 24 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico for FY 2004. The incentive payments were awarded to states that increased the number of total adoptions, special needs adoptions, and older child adoptions over their FY 2004 adoptions. The funding was provided based on the Adoption Promotion Act (P.L. 108-145), which was signed into law on December 2, 2003. The act reauthorized the adoption incentive program through FY 2008 and appropriated a total of \$43 million per year for the bonuses. The key changes or new provisions in the act included the addition of older child adoption bonuses, updated baselines, a three-tiered bonus system, and a new penalty provision related to Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System submissions. In comparison, 31 states and Puerto Rico were awarded \$17.9 million for FY 2003. More information is available at http://www.acf.hhs.gov/news/press/2005/adoption_incentives.htm.

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